For old-fashioned comfort on a cold winter’s night, look no further than Plain Jane pot roast. Like most comfort foods, tradition trumps exotic spices; you’ll find no fancy footwork here. The key to this braising technique is to roast the meat in a relatively small amount of liquid. A heavy-bottomed pot with a tight fitting lid is essential. You have a bit of work up front, but not much coddling. And if you add vegetables to the pot at the end of cooking, you will be rewarded with a one-dish meal.

Paramount to the success of pot roast is the right cut of meat. A chuck roast, which comes from the front part of the animal, is particularly suited to slow braising. The muscle fibers break down slowly during cooking and the marbling of fat between the fibers melts, giving the roast good flavor and a tender texture. Ask the butcher to tie it for you to keep if from falling apart while it cooks. Other leaner cuts of meat such as a bottom round roast or eye round roast may look appealing but they will be stringy enough to disappoint you. The braising pot is important, too. It should be large enough to accommodate the roast, but not so large as to leave the meat swimming in liquid. A six-quart pot or thereabouts is optimal.

Pot roast is even better the next day if you can resist diving in after so many hours of beefy aromas filling your kitchen. When the meat is tender, remove it from the pot and allow it to cool for about half an hour. Wrap it snugly in foil and refrigerate it for up to two days. Refrigerate the sauce and vegetables separately. About an hour before serving, set the oven at 350 degrees. Skim and discard the fat from the sauce and heat it in a saucepan. Slice the meat and place it in a baking dish. Surround the slices with the vegetables and pour the sauce over them. Cover loosely with foil and heat in the oven until hot all the way through, from 20 to 30 minutes. Then sit down to a meal worthy of a Norman Rockwell painting.

Slow-cooked pot roast with potatoes, carrots, and onions
Serves 6

POT ROAST
3 1/2 to 4 pounds boneless chuck roast, tied with butcher twine
Salt and pepper, to taste
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 carrot, finely chopped
1 stalk celery, finely chopped
1 tablespoon tomato paste
3 tablespoons flour
3 sprigs fresh thyme, or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
2 bay leaves
1 1/2 cups red wine
2 cups chicken stock
1. Set the oven at 300 degrees. Have on hand a large ovenproof casserole with a lid. Sprinkle the roast generously all over with salt and pepper.

2. In the casserole over medium-high heat, heat the oil. Brown the roast for 2 to 3 minutes on a side until browned all over (total browning time is 8 to 10 minutes). Resist the urge to turn too soon or often; the meat will release easily from the pot after a couple of minutes. Transfer to a plate.

3. Add the onion, carrot, and celery to the pot and cook for 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes. Sprinkle in the flour, and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the thyme, bay leaves, wine, stock, and salt and pepper to taste. Set the meat on top. Bring the liquid to a simmer. Cover the pot and transfer it to the oven. Cook for 3 1/2 hours, turning every hour. Remove the pot from the oven and add the vegetables.

**VEGETABLES**
1 pound (about 18) small waxy potatoes such as yellow or red creamers, halved
6 carrots, halved lengthwise and cut into 2 1/2-inch pieces
12 small boiling onions, peeled
2 tablespoons chopped parsley (for garnish)

1. Add the potatoes, carrots, and onions to the pot. Cover, and return it to the oven. Cook for 45 minutes to an hour, or until the vegetables are tender. (Total cooking time for meat and vegetables is about 4 1/2 hours.)

2. Transfer the roast to a carving board and cover it loosely with foil to keep warm. With a slotted spoon, transfer the potatoes, onions, and carrots to a plate. Cover and keep warm.

3. Remove the thyme and bay leaves from the pot and allow the liquid to settle. With a large spoon, skim off and discard the fat that rises to the surface. Taste, and season with more salt and pepper, if you like.

4. Slice the roast, discarding the string as you slice, and transfer the meat to a platter. Surround it with the vegetables and pour some of the sauce over the meat. Sprinkle with parsley and pass extra sauce separately.

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